

CITY OF SANTA ROSA
CITY COUNCIL

TO: MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL
FROM: JENNIFER BURKE, DEPUTY DIRECTOR - WATER AND
ENGINEERING RESOURCES,
WATER DEPARTMENT
SUBJECT: GROUNDWATER SUSTAINABILITY AGENCY FORMATION
UPDATE

AGENDA ACTION: STUDY SESSION

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended by the Water Department that the Council hold a study session discussing the progress in developing a local Groundwater Sustainability Agency for the Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sub-basin in conformance with the 2014 Sustainable Groundwater Management Act. This item is for information only and no action will be taken.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Staff will present an informational session on the progress of developing a local Groundwater Sustainability Agency for the Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sub-basin in conformance with the 2014 Sustainable Groundwater Management Act. This item is related to Council Goal #3: Provide Leadership for Environmental Initiatives by establishing Santa Rosa as a leader in the formation of a Groundwater Sustainability Agency whose primary function is to sustainably manage groundwater supplies in the Santa Rosa Plain Sub-basin.

BACKGROUND

The 2014 Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) requires that eligible agencies in medium and high priority groundwater basins across the State form local Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) by June 30, 2017. The priority status of groundwater basins was established by the Department of Water Resources. Locally within Sonoma County, three basins have been designated as medium priority, and must comply with SGMA. These basins (including sub-basins) are the Santa Rosa Plain Sub-basin, the Petaluma Valley and the Sonoma Valley groundwater basins. The Santa Rosa Plain Sub-basin covers an area of approximately 80,000 acres and is home

to approximately half the population of Sonoma County. The majority of the City of Santa Rosa overlies the Santa Rosa Plain Sub-basin.

Agencies that are eligible to participate in the formation of a GSA must have authority over land use planning, water supply or water management. In the Santa Rosa Plain, the eligible agencies that will form the GSA include the cities of Santa Rosa, Rohnert Park, Sebastopol, Cotati, and the Town of Windsor, as well as the Sonoma County Water Agency, the County of Sonoma, and the Sonoma Resource Conservation District. Although only the agencies listed above may form a GSA (either individually or in collaboration), the GSA must consider the interests of all beneficial uses and users of groundwater within the basin. The intent of SGMA is to provide local and regional agencies the authority to sustainably manage groundwater. If local agencies do not form a GSA within the required timeframe, the State has the authority to develop and implement an interim plan until such time that local agencies assume management over the groundwater basins/sub-basins.

The local GSAs must develop and adopt a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) by January 31, 2022, and demonstrate successful groundwater management by 2042. The purpose of the GSP will be to describe the basin's geology, analyze short and long-term trends of the basin's water balance and other measures of sustainability, and compile data necessary to resolve disputes regarding sustainable yield, beneficial uses and water rights.

Once formed, the GSAs will have broad discretionary authorities, pursuant to SGMA, to implement the GSPs and achieve sustainability. The authorities are as follows:

- Require registration of wells and measurement of extractions
- Request revisions to basin boundaries
- Regulate extractions
- Implement capital projects
- Assess fees

PRIOR CITY COUNCIL REVIEW

On October 20, 2015, the City Council adopted Resolution No. 28702 (attached to this staff report) supporting the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act Principles for Developing Governance Options.

ANALYSIS

Beginning in early 2015, staff from each of the GSA-eligible agencies began meeting together regularly to discuss important issues and develop a framework for establishing a GSA. Guided by the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act Principles for Developing Governance Options, it was recommended by staffs of the GSA-eligible agencies that each medium priority groundwater basin/sub-basin in Sonoma County should establish its own GSA through the creation of a Joint Powers Authority in order to

maximize local control since issues germane to one individual basin may not necessarily apply to the other basin(s). For example, issues related to saline groundwater found in Sonoma Valley are not relevant in the Santa Rosa Plain sub-basin. It is further anticipated that each GSA would agree to certain areas of coordination between the GSAs, but would retain its own authorities and prepare its own GSP.

A series of public workshops have been conducted in 2015 and 2016 in each of the three basins to inform the public about the requirements of SGMA, and to solicit feedback and receive public input regarding the development of the GSAs. Public participation was robust, and a dedicated website which includes information from these public meetings as well as other SGMA-related information can be found at www.sonomacountygroundwater.org.

The primary issues that have been the focus of discussions among the staff of the GSA-eligible agencies within the Santa Rosa Plain Sub-basin include the following:

- GSA Formation – it is envisioned that the GSA will be formed via a Joint Powers Agreement.
- Board of Directors – the GSA will be governed by a Board of Directors. Each GSA eligible agency will appoint one director to the GSA Board of Directors.
- Voting – Each board member will have one vote. Approval of items will require two tiers. The first tier would be a simple or super majority depending on the topic and the second tier would consist of block voting, consisting of two blocks based on land use authority. A majority of each of the two blocks would be required for approval of an item.
- Advisory Committee – An advisory committee would be formed to provide input and recommendations to the GSA Board of Directors. The advisory committee would consist of one member appointed from each GSA eligible agency and interest based members that would be appointed by the GSA Board of Directors. Applicants interested in serving in the interest based positions would submit an application to the GSA Board of Directors for consideration and appointment.
- Public Process – All Board meetings and advisory committee meetings would be open to the public and subject to the Brown Act.
- Funding - Staff of the GSA-eligible agencies have formed a funding subcommittee to explore estimated costs associated with establishing a GSA and preparing a GSP.

FISCAL IMPACT

The Study Session is for information only and no action is being taken. Therefore, there is no fiscal impact from the Study Session. Once formed, the GSAs will be empowered through SGMA to impose fees for a variety of purposes including program administration. However, prior to implementation of the GSP for the Santa Rosa Plain, funding requirements will need to be quantified and allocated appropriately to the GSA participating agencies.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

This action is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) because it is not a project which has a potential for resulting in either a direct physical change in the environment, or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment, pursuant to CEQA Guideline section 15378. Additionally, Water Code Section 10653 of the UWMP Act states that Plans are exempt from CEQA.

BOARD/COMMISSION/COMMITTEE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On October 20, 2016, the Board of Public Utilities conducted a study session on the Groundwater Sustainability Agency Formation and provided direction to staff.

NOTIFICATION

Not applicable

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1 - City Council Resolution No. 28702.

CONTACT

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